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Northwest Regional
Educational Laboratory



OJJDP

National Resource Center for Safe Schools

the Safety Zone

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New Center Promotes Safe Schools

Welcome to the first issue of *The Safety Zone*, the quarterly newsletter of the new National Resource Center for Safe Schools. The Center is operated by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) under joint sponsorship of the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program and the Justice Department's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP).

Every community hopes to provide safe and secure schools for its children. But good intentions alone won't do the job. Creating safe schools involves careful planning, knowing how to apply sound educational practices, and being ready to respond to defuse a potential crisis. The Center can help by bringing you and your community the practical, research-based information, training, and technical assistance you need to create school environments conducive to teaching and learning.

How can we promote, create, and sustain safe learning environments? Center Director Carlos Sundermann says schools

can implement a combination of several basic approaches "to reduce the risk of violence and also strengthen the bonds between young people, their families, and their communities."

Research tells us that school safety can't be isolated from overall school improvement.



Safer schools tend to report higher student achievement, fewer disciplinary problems, and better attendance than schools with more frequent episodes of crime or violence. Safe schools are places where students and teachers feel secure and comfortable so that they can go about the important business of learning.

Creating a safe school environment involves much more than protecting students and

teachers from the rare, horrific incidents that generate headlines. It means addressing a broad spectrum of behaviors that can pollute a peaceful school environment, including hate crimes, gang activities, sexual harassment, and bullying. In working with schools and

communities, the Center will address violence prevention in broad terms.

The specific approaches that the Center will support with resources and technical expertise include:

- Assessing local needs
- Promoting sound school policies
- Developing early warning and prevention guidelines

- Using curriculum-based programs that teach violence-prevention skills
- Involving parents and community members in promoting safe schools
- Mentoring at-risk youth
- Improving physical facilities

There's no one solution to school violence, Sundermann cautions. "But the good news is there are a lot of things schools can do to defuse and prevent violence."

How Prepared Is Your School?

We want to help communities plan ahead to keep their schools peaceful and focused on learning.



Imagine that you are a new high school principal. At 2 p.m., Christina, one of your teachers, comes into your office shaken and upset. She tells you she's heard a rumor that Tony, a student in her fourth-period social studies class, has brought a gun to school and is threatening to get even with some teachers.

You try to stay calm and reach for the phone. The Sheriff's office doesn't seem to take you seriously when you insist you want an officer dispatched to the school.

Meanwhile, you decide to find Tony yourself. But when you ask your secretary to contact Tony's teachers, she tells you that only a third of the rooms have functioning intercoms.

When two deputies finally arrive, they agree to search for Tony. If they can find him, they'll detain him on suspicion of possessing a weapon and contact his parents.

At 3:45 p.m., you assemble your staff for an emergency meeting. Teachers react to the rumor about Tony with shouts and angry recriminations. You know you need a plan to get through this crisis, so you ask the staff to reassemble for one hour before classes start the next morning. By then, you hope, Tony will be in custody and calm will be restored to your school.

As you drive home, you realize that somewhere out there is a student with a gun. The safety of every member of your school community is on the line. Can you protect them?

I hope you never have to live through a situation like

this. But what if you do? Will you be ready?

At the new National Resource Center for Safe Schools, we want to help communities plan ahead to keep their schools peaceful and focused on learning. We know that most schools are safe places. That's the good news. But we also know that violence is a real threat which no school can afford to overlook.

The Center is here to bring you the research and resources you need to answer your questions and help you create a safe learning environment for your students and staff. We are staffed with experts who have real-world classroom experience as well as a solid understanding of the latest violence-prevention research.

How well prepared is your school and community to address safety issues? Ask yourself a few questions:

- What has your school done to prevent violence?
- What have you done to create an environment conducive to learning in which respect, appreciation for diversity, and peaceful problem-solving are the norm?
- Does your school have a comprehensive safe school plan in place?
- Does your plan include a crisis-response procedure?
- Do you have a crisis-response team that is well rehearsed and ready to spring into action?
- Can you count on your local police or sheriff to be responsive?
- Can you quickly secure the school building in the



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event of a crisis so you can protect students, teachers, and other community members?

- Can you communicate with your teachers quickly and effectively?
- Can you reach parents quickly?
- Is your state working with your district on crisis-response plans?

We will not always be able to prevent terrible things from happening in our schools. But there is much we can do proactively, based on the latest research and the best practices in education. Perhaps no one measure would have prevented Tony from looking for a weapon. But many thoughtful, coordinated steps—from developing early warning guidelines to teaching and modeling joint problem-solving skills—might have helped this principal keep his school community out of danger.

I look forward to working with you to address your concerns and help you create the safe, positive school environment we all want for our children, teachers, and communities.

—Carlos Sundermann

We're Here To Help

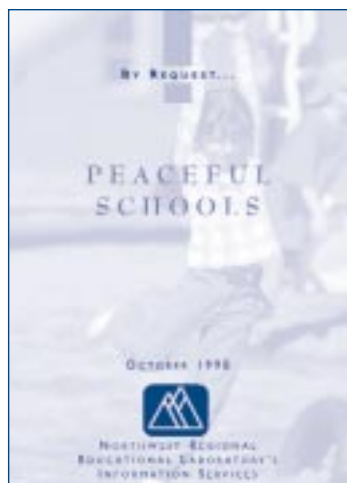
FIND US ONLINE. Want to learn more about how the National Resource Center for Safe Schools can help you? Our brand-new Web site (www.nwrel.org/safe) gives you an overview of our programs and provides a wealth of resources on school safety. Here's where you'll find:

Free publications. *Peaceful Schools*, a new publication from NWREL that looks at how schools are managing the threat of violence while maintaining their educational focus, is just one of many publications you can download for free from our Web site.

Training news. Need help creating a crisis-management plan or training your staff on conflict-resolution skills? Check out our listings of training and technical assistance events.

Lending library. Search our library database to find and request the books you need.

Research. Identify the most up-to-date research and jour-



nal articles by searching our reference database.

Promising and effective practices. Learn about the most promising program models by browsing our resource database.

Facts and figures. What do statistics tell us about school safety issues and trends? We highlight key facts and figures, then provide supporting resources to help you put these statistics in context.

Useful links. If you're look-

ing for information about a specific aspect of school safety—from dealing with gangs to teaching law-related education to parent resources—check out our links to other organizations and key programs.

Assistance. Need more help? Our online request form makes it easy to get the answers and information you need.

We'll continue to expand our Web site as the Center develops more tools, information, and technical assistance for promoting safe schools. Check in often, and watch future issues of *The Safety Zone* to learn what's new and useful on our Web site.

GIVE US A CALL. Our toll-free number (1-800-547-6339, ext. 131) is your central access point for requesting training and other technical assistance. Call us to obtain more information about safe schools and violence prevention.

The Center provides a central access point for requesting training and technical assistance and obtaining more information about safe schools.

Most Crime Occurs Away from Schools

Key indicators of school crime and safety show that most crime against young people takes place away from the school setting.

Among the highlights of *Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 1998*, a joint report released by the Departments of Justice and Education:

- Few of the murders and suicides of youth occur at school
- Students are victims of

fewer nonfatal crimes of serious violence (rape, robbery, or aggravated assault) at school than when they are away from school

- Most schools did not report any serious violent crimes to police in 1996
- For the 20-year period, 1976-96, the percentage of 12th-graders injured in violence at school has not changed

The full report, drawing on comprehensive sources to

present the perspectives of students, teachers, principals, and the general public, is available online (www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/iscs98.htm or nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=98251).

The National Resource Center for Safe Schools Web site (www.nwrel.org/safe) also includes recent statistics to help you stay informed about school safety issues and trends.



Teaching conflict-resolution skills can lead to reduction of violence, decrease in truancy, fewer suspensions, and less staff time spent on discipline.



Teach Skills To Handle Conflict Constructively

Conflict is a fact of life. At school, at home, and in our communities, disagreements are bound to arise. Teaching students how to settle their differences gives them skills that will help them for a lifetime.

What is conflict resolution?

In a fact sheet prepared by OJJDP, Donni LeBoeuf and Robin V. Delany-Shabazz explain that conflict resolution

have been used to teach conflict-resolution skills in schools. LeBoeuf and Delany-Shabazz outline four general approaches, which are often combined in practice. They are:

Process curriculum. This is a curriculum-based approach that teaches conflict resolution as a distinct lesson or course. In such programs, students, staff, and administrators are taught to practice negotiation as a means of

skills, principles, and problem-solving processes. Conflict-resolution education is incorporated into the core subjects of the curriculum and into classroom-management strategies.

Peaceable school. This approach builds on the peaceable classroom by integrating conflict resolution into the management of the institution. Every member of the school community—from crossing guard to classroom teacher—learns and models conflict-resolution skills.

Conflict-resolution programs are most effective, the authors note, when they involve the entire faculty or school community, are integrated into institutional management practices and the educational curriculum, and are linked to family and community mediation efforts.



involves creative problem solving. "Parties to disputes learn to identify their interests, express their views, and seek mutually acceptable solutions," the authors write.

Teaching students conflict-resolution skills can lead to a host of benefits in schools, including a reduction of violence, a decrease in truancy, a reduction in suspensions, and less staff time spent on discipline. Participating students gain lifelong decision-making skills and enhance their self-esteem.

A variety of approaches

achieving goals and settling disputes. Where such skills are taught, parents and teachers report less need to intervene in conflicts. They also note improvements in students' ability to communicate.

Peer mediation. Trained youth mediators work with their peers to find nonviolent resolutions to conflicts. Many schools and communities employ peer mediation as part of a comprehensive strategy to prevent violence.

Peaceable classroom. This is a whole-classroom method that teaches students basic

Want to learn more?

Working with the Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, the Justice Department's OJJDP has developed a guide to help schools, juvenile justice programs, and others who work with youth select and implement quality conflict-resolution education programs. For a copy of *Conflict Resolution Education: A Guide to Implementing Programs in Schools, Youth-Serving Organizations, and Community and Juvenile Justice Settings* (NCJ 160935), call the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse (1-800-638-8736), or find it online (www.ncjrs.org/ojhome.htm).

What Can You Do?

Working together is the best strategy for creating safe schools, reducing the threat of violence, and helping students learn in peace. What can individuals and groups in your community do to help? Here are a just a few ideas from experts at the U.S. Department of Education and Department of Justice.

What Communities Can Do

- Establish school-community partnerships
- Identify and measure the problem
- Set measurable goals and objectives
- Identify appropriate research-based programs and strategies and implement a comprehensive plan

What Schools Can Do

- Design an effective disciplinary policy
- Build a partnership with local law enforcement
- Train school staff in all aspects of violence prevention
- Provide all students access to school psychologists or counselors
- Provide crisis-response services
- Train the entire school on how to avoid and prevent violence
- Create a climate of tolerance and respect
- Work with community members and business leaders
- Involve students in making decisions about school policies and programs

- Involve students in developing after-school programming
- Teach and use conflict resolution skills

What Students Can Do

- Set an example by behaving responsibly
- Report crimes and threats to school officials
- Get involved in peacemaking and youth-development programs at school
- Learn how to avoid becoming a victim
- Learn and practice conflict-resolution skills
- Respect yourself and all other members of the school community
- Reach out to troubled peers; make sure they get help
- Value diversity; promote goodwill

What Parents Can Do

- Communicate actively with children
- Use clear and consistent discipline
- Model positive social behavior
- Get involved with school and community organizations and activities
- Make sure guns and weapons are out of reach and ammunition locked up separately; better still, do not keep firearms or dangerous weapons at home
- Limit children's exposure to and experience of crime and violence, including TV and media violence
- Participate in family-management training or counseling opportunities

Based on: U.S. Departments of Education and Justice. (1998). Annual Report on School Safety. Washington, DC.

What Works? Share Your Ideas

How have you helped your community create and promote safe schools? Share your suggestions with other readers of *The Safety Zone* and help us generate a national dialogue about peaceful schools. Write to us at the National Resource Center for Safe Schools at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 101 S.W. Main, Suite 500, Portland, Oregon 97204, or electronically at safeschools@nwrel.org.

Train the entire school on how to avoid and prevent violence.



—
 “No longer
 could we say, ‘It
 can’t happen
 here.’”
 —



Be Ready To Respond

Cathy Kennedy Paine received a phone call last May that drew on every bit of experience she had accumulated during her 22 years as a school psychologist. As crisis-response team leader for Oregon’s Springfield School District, Paine was among the first to receive a call for help when a troubled student named Kip Kinkel walked into his crowded high school cafeteria and opened fire on his classmates.

The Thurston High School incident left two students dead and 22 others injured. “Our sense of safety and security was shattered along with our innocence,” Paine said. “No longer could we say, ‘It can’t happen here.’”

Although nothing could have prepared Paine and her colleagues for the magnitude of that event, she has taken stock of the lessons learned by surviving a major school crisis. Paine shared her insights in a special issue of *Northwest Education* magazine devoted to school violence prevention. The highlights of Paine’s advice:

Before a crisis

- Coordinate emergency plans with community agencies, including police, fire, rescue, hospital, and mental health services. Stage a mock disaster to see how fast you can coordinate a response.
- Educate and train crisis-response team members on a variety of topics, including children’s grief and loss responses, critical-incident debriefing, student-support

techniques, suicide response, and trauma response.

- Develop a written plan that describes intervention procedures and the responsibilities of team members. Create a phone tree and update it annually.

During a crisis

- Communicate within the district through an effective, foolproof communication system. Cell phones, pagers, and two-way radios may be essential. In a real crisis, expect phone lines to be flooded with calls.
- Drink water and breathe deeply when facing a traumatic event. Support the caregivers, who will be physically and emotionally exhausted.
- Communicate with the media on a regular basis. Develop a strategy and designate a spokesperson.
- Support students, staff, and families.

After a crisis

- Provide follow-up support to students, staff, and community members. Anticipate that long-term follow-up will be required to assist the victims, families, students, and staff in recovery.

Copies of the Spring 1999 issue of *Northwest Education* magazine, published by NWREL, are available for free from the National Resource Center for Safe Schools (or browse the contents of *Northwest Education* online on the NWREL Web site, www.nwrel.org/nwedu/)



ONLINE RESOURCES ON SCHOOL SAFETY

Communities in Schools

This national network of school-community partners focuses on keeping students in school and successful. Local partnerships bring existing community resources into schools to meet children's needs and help them concentrate on learning. (www.cisnet.org/fed.htm)

Conflict Resolution Education

A Guide to Implementing Programs in Schools, Youth-Serving Organizations, and Community and Juvenile Justice Settings is a collaborative effort by the Departments of Justice and Education. A thorough reference tool, it contains basic information about conflict resolution, planning and assessment tools, and descriptions of successful programs. (Download full text at: www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles/conflic.pdf)

Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools: An Action Guide

This guide outlines action steps for schools, parents, students, and community and business groups, and provides information on specific issues affecting school safety. It also contains research and evaluation findings, resources, and additional readings. (www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS/actguid/index.html)

Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools

This report offers research-based practices designed to assist schools and communities in identifying warning signs early and developing prevention, intervention, and crisis-response plans. (www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/earlywrn.html)

Manual to Combat Truancy

This guide from Safe and Drug-Free Schools outlines principles to help parents, school officials, law-enforcement agencies, and communities design their own strategies for combating truancy. It describes successful models and shows how antitrucancy initiatives are working. (www.ed.gov/pubs/Truancy/)

National Center for Conflict Resolution Education

The center provides training and technical assistance to advance the implementation of conflict-resolution education programs for youth, with a goal of increasing the development of these programs in schools, juvenile justice facilities, and communities throughout the nation. (<http://www.nccre.org>)

Preventing Youth Hate Crime: A Manual for Schools and Communities

Programs and resources that can be used in preventing youth hate crime and hate-motivated behavior

are highlighted on this site. (www.ed.gov/pubs/Hate-Crime/start.html)

Safe and Drug-Free Schools Programs

This program is the federal government's primary vehicle for reducing drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, as well as violence, through education and prevention activities in our nation's schools. (www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS)

Safe and Smart: Making After-School Hours Work for Kids

This report, jointly authored by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, highlights research on the potential of after-school programs to increase the safety of children, reduce their risk-taking behaviors, and improve learning. (www.ed.gov/pubs/Safe-andSmart/)

Safe, Drug-Free and Effective Schools for All Students: What Works!

This report evaluates programs formulated under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program. The goal of the project was to learn about schools that managed to reduce discipline problems and improve the learning and behavior of all students, including those with disabilities. This report reflects three site visits conducted by a research team accompanied by expert panels. (www.airdc.org/cecp/resource/safe&drug_free/main.htm)

Questions
about school
safety? Online
resources offer
help.



Upcoming Events

May 14-16: Youth for Justice Leadership Conference in Oak Brook, Illinois. Contact: Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago at (312) 663-9057.

June 27-30: Taking Charge in Changing Times, a National Media Education Conference, in St. Paul, Minnesota, hosted by the Partnership for Media Education. Contact: National Media Education Conference Office, 2121 S. Oneida Street, Suite 325, Denver, Colorado 80224. Phone: (303) 756-8380.

June 21-23: Conflict Resolution in Schools, the seventh-annual summer conference of the National Center for Conflict Resolution Education (NCCRE), takes place in Chicago, Illinois. For registration information contact: NCCRE, 110 West Main Street, Urbana, Illinois 61801. Phone: (800) 308-9419. Or download registration information from the NCCRE Web site: (www.nccre.org/conf/register/).

The Safety Zone

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